

‘Friends. Friendship. Honey.

(referenced on website: Essay on Friendship for Philosophy, Sidsid. BA Degree; ‘Strange Meeting’ Wilfred Owen Minor Thesis MA, and in ‘Telling the Bees’.)

Friendship is a recurrent theme in my work and is celebrated specifically in the following poems, ‘James’¹, ‘Atlantic Inlet’, ‘Sgarúint na gCompánach’², ‘Passover Night’, ‘The Road to Patmos’³, ‘Esparto Man’⁴ as well as in the associated love poems of ‘The Bannow Days’, ‘Deep Ploughing’, ‘Hang By Me’ and ‘The Gentle Palm’ Sequence⁵. Friendship informs ‘Letter to Connla’⁶ and the Orpheus - Phlebas relationship in ‘Orpheus’⁷.

This friendship, which sometimes approaches the state of love, is developed in the following relationships, or dimensions, – father-son, mother-son, son-father, son-mother, brother-sister, brother-brother, friend-friend contexts. This ‘love’ may also extend to country as in the manner described by Brian Coffey⁸.

From my perspective, friendship as emotional, or semi-emotional state, is autonomous and self-complete. Friendship as expressed in the poems listed above involves the promotion of goodness and happiness between the named participants. There is a sense of the spontaneous, the gratuitous and inevitable in the emotion depicted. It is forever:

‘I had meant to say good
Bye offering a gift by which no heaven, hell
Would separate us ever.....

¹ Ennis, *Dolmen Hill*, pp. 20-21.

² Ennis, *Night on Hibernia*, pp.26, 25-29, respectively.

³ Ennis, *In a Green Shade*, pp. 105-107, 108-109 respectively.

⁴ Ennis, *Telling the Bees*, pp.85-90.

⁵ Ennis, *Ibid*, pp. 11-19, 87, 97-112, respectively.

⁶ Ennis, *Ibid*, pp.8-44.

⁷ Ennis, *Dolmen Hill*, pp.38-86.

⁸ Coffey, *Poems and Versions*, ‘Missouri Sequence’, ‘there is a Love of Ireland/ withering for Irishmen’, p. 70.

.... These lines cut us somewhat in cross-section,
Engrave the blank metal plates with what was sure⁹.

The power of friendship is accepted as an indivisible and lasting ‘mythos’ in itself. The power of reverence expressed in friendship and love overmasters the voice either of reason, or of the intellect, should either engage in foolhardy criticism of the state¹⁰.

This emotional state is a very basic one. The person finds other cognate beings in the same world as himself, or herself, and thrills *at* their presence. Friendship is the response made *to* their presence. It is the very antithesis to the state of anomie also depicted by me¹¹. It is a *sine qua non* of friendship that goodness is always wished to the other, seen as friend, in the same measure as the person would wish it for himself or herself. The greater the friendship, the greater is the apprehending of the friend as one’s other self. The friend may be seen as the other half of the person’s soul and his, or her, absence, seen as a kind of death. A kind of subliminal empathy or communication exists even over long distances at all times, itself a proof of abiding friendship:

‘Connla, I love the first snowflakes on my face.
On winter nights, I know you live, my twin’¹².

The deepest recesses of the minds of friends are shared in common. Even the most antipathetic of individuals can share, or learn to share, this emotional munificence¹³.

Friendship grows from the deep soil of earned esteem. The persons grow to share the same soul in two distinct bodies. In maintaining a continued communion with the other, the

⁹ Ennis, *Night on Hibernia*, ‘Sgarúint na gCompánach’, p.28.

¹⁰ Cf. Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, Folly no. 68, where Erasmus considers the divine dimension of love.

¹¹ Cf. depiction throughout ‘Letter to Connla’.

¹² Ennis, *Telling the Bees*, p.21.

¹³ Cf. *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the earliest poems recorded, which deals with the immortal friendship of Gilgamesh and Enkida.

individual finds that his or her sense of security is increased, that he or she is pervaded by a sense of joy, spontaneous in its appearance and beyond human power to create merely by his or her own self. In my sonnet, 'A Father to Son', this spontaneity is evocative of a divine dimension stretching through eternity,

'I measure out my love for you in far too few embraces of the human.....
.....And I have waited all eternity, and before it just for this –
To see you on the mountain, and in the river, with the water
Glistening on your flowing locks.....'¹⁴

Talking with a friend may be compared to thinking out aloud. Writing to a friend reflects the same phenomenon. The technique of 'Letter to Connla' flows from this realisation (the technique, itself, of the 'Literary Letter' or 'Epistle' has a long cultural tradition). In 'Letter to Connla', the letter forms the technique of an extended monologue. In this monologue, the happiness the Unnamed experiences is enhanced, his misery is abated, his joy is doubled and his grief, divided, or made bearable, as he writes to, or thinks aloud of, Connla.

Friendship evokes something beyond the ordinary, or mundane, in humans. It may not be too much to say that it has an immortal quality. This is the conclusion of one of the oldest of world poems, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*,¹⁵. It is acknowledged, also, of course, that the virtues of those who have died appear greater in our estimation than when they lived!

Friendships have their ups and downs. The very loss of friendships, or the instability of once firm relationships, leaves a chill on the heart. The speaker in 'Telling the Bees' admits to this melancholic reflection and to his resolve against future failure in 'Esparto Man':

'This is the season when friendships fail.
This time I will not let you slip from me,
Never again to have left but the memory,

¹⁴ Ennis, *Down in the Deeper Helicon*, p.98.

¹⁵ See footnote 13 in this section, reference to *Gilgamesh*.

Only the smoke-stained smears of propolis.

Smear'd fingertips worse than the nicotine.
Friends. Friendship. Honey. Products of their hive.

There is nothing else under the sun'¹⁶.

It is also generally accepted that the greater the friendship is, the more permanent it should be. The love of long-term partners is a type of this friendship. This is friendship with the confident assurance of union, which opposes and overcomes the daily to-and-fro of separation. The state is associated with attitudes of devotion, quietude, acquiescence and will to continue. I treat of these characteristics in 'The Bannow Days' sequence. The keynote to these poems is expressed in the epigraph from Dave Smith's 'Graduation',

'day after day stringing us through
the ordinary this house has learned to keep'.¹⁷

'Reflexology' is a poem of acquiescence in the everyday,

'Let us make love then, talk of simple things,
The deeds you did today, what you had to eat...'

a poem which yet hungers for a greater love,

'And love me again, I beg you, you must
Or my dry soul will give up, turn to dust'.

'Coffee Jars', with its more positive rendering of Eliot's dismissive 'coffee spoons', considers all the potential of love, or friendship, that is yet to be, or not yet measured out,—

'How many words of affection have we
Not spoken yet.....

..... Our grassy hearts are calm
Today, threaded with root fibres, attachments, tendrils of marram'.

¹⁶ Ennis, *Telling the Bees*, p.85.

¹⁷ Ennis, *Down in the Deeper Helicon*, pp.11-19, All of the subsequent quotations in this section are taken from these pages. Cf. Smith, *Night Pleasures*, p. 216.

The image of the restless sands bonded by sea-grass reflects the partnership state.

‘August Renovations’ written after a visit to Tintern Abbey on Bannow Bay in Co. Wexford, talks of a renewal of promises,

‘Pride of restoration. And I see, again, our clear outline
(Through bunged up by useless trick and the debris of years)’.

‘Initials’ recalls the personal and emotional costs of dedicated friendship, or love,

‘The years have built their cities below our eyes
Daubed their graffiti on the chipboard of the mind’.

‘Gratitude’ celebrates the re-doubled power of sexual love,

‘I took you to the spacious heights and there you knew no fears.
You caressed me through places I haven’t been for years’.

The following poems in the Bannow sequence, ‘Tourniquet’, ‘Over Benn’s Bridge’ and ‘Turbulence’ widen the perspective on personal love and variously describe, or allude to, the various forces that would separate, disjoin, fragment, or bleed enduring friendship. They describe the resolve to withstand these negatives,

‘Our fingers move to provide a tourniquet’.

Love, in the foregoing poems, is seen as the sublimation of friendship. Alternatively, one might say that friendship is love and one of the highest forms of love. Physical love is seen as the supreme emotional form of organic union between persons and the supremely personal form of union. In this attitude, each is conscious of fulfilment and reality to the utmost extent of which he or she is capable. This desire of individuals for complete union may be seen as figurative of an all-inclusive Reality. Each person in a partnership is loved for the sake of the Love which each possesses for the other in reciprocal interdependence, a state which may be

seen as emblematic of a supreme Reality, or Oneness in all things, despite constituent human flaws. This love is one of the verities that continues to flourish in art, music and poetry, and requires personality at its utmost peak, and at its best, to achieve it. The deeply organic nature of the state is hinted at in 'Deep Ploughing':

'I am a man reborn and feel all that is good

In your arms up and down the ash bole
The beech trunk, and the naked sycamore,
That stand by us as we wait on, as if for evermore,
Erect and leafless for the explosive green growth of the soul'.